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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: GETTING TO "YES" ON NATO MEMBERSHIP

REF: SKOPJE 21 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

11. (C) A NATO invitation for Macedonia would strengthen domestic reforms and inter-ethnic relations here, bolstering Macedonia's positive influence as a factor for regional stability as Kosovo status develops. NATO Ambassadors in Skopje share that view, and believe Macedonia has met NATO performance standards. A Greek veto would rob Athens of leverage in negotiations with Skopje on the name. NATO rejection of Macedonia, especially if coupled with acceptance of Albania and the Kosovo independence, would shock Macedonia. It would weaken the influence of NATO and U.S. on policymakers here, provoke nationalist attitudes, and inflame inter-ethnic relations, endangering regional stability. To avoid that outcome, we are urging Macedonia to reach out to Greece before the Bucharest Summit with a name proposal that goes beyond its current dual name approach, and to agree to arranging final resolution of the name dispute after an invitation but before ratification by all NATO allies. End summary.

POSITIVELY SHAPING MACEDONIA'S FUTURE, AND THE REGION'S, FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

12. (C) The NATO membership decision at Bucharest this April will shape Macedonia's future for a generation. A NATO invitation will foster continued domestic reforms and bolster Macedonia as a force for regional stability. If Greece withholds its veto (reftel) and allows a membership invitation to proceed, while focusing on the period between an invitation and ratification by NATO allies to reach a solution to the name dispute, that will be a win-win outcome that benefits Macedonia (keeping reforms on track, bolstering investor confidence), Greece (maintaining its leverage on the name dispute), and the region (a more stable operating environment as Kosovo independence proceeds).

13. (C) NATO membership would increase Macedonia's momentum toward more open and transparent democratic institutions, modern governance standards, and economic growth. Membership would spur greater efforts to qualify for EU membership negotiations, further consolidating political stability in Macedonia that would benefit the region as a whole. The prospect of NATO membership has had a unifying effect across political and ethnic lines in Macedonia, and a membership

invitation would go a long way toward intensifying that positive effect.

¶4. (C) Every NATO-member ambassador in Skopje, with the exception of the Greek representative, tells us they believe Macedonia is ready for and deserves NATO membership, despite shortcomings in some areas. They share our views on the importance of NATO membership for Macedonia's continued reform progress and ability to attract investment, and for regional stability. The alternative, Macedonia's failure to achieve NATO membership, would set the country on a different, destabilizing, and potentially damaging course.

GREEK VETO: A COST-BENEFIT CALCULUS

¶5. (C) We leave it to Embassy Athens to assess how the GOG tallies the costs and benefits of its threat to veto a membership invitation absent a solution to the name issue. From our perspective, however, a Greek veto would leave a gaping hole in the security architecture of southeast Europe, set back the reform process in Macedonia, and -- by forcing Skopje to withdraw from the 1995 Interim Accord -- eliminate any practical leverage Athens might have in the short-term in resolving the name dispute.

ADDITIONAL NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF A VETO

¶6. (C) A Greek veto would, in our view, produce a lose-lose outcome for our interest in seeing a mutually acceptable resolution of the name dispute. In that event, a wounded and resentful Skopje would take the name issue to the UN General Assembly and UNSC for resolution (reftel), fully convinced it

SKOPJE 00000032 002 OF 003

could garner international support for eliminating the hated FYROM acronym in exchange for the unfettered use of its constitutional name. The Macedonian public would react with hostility and anger. "Alexander the Great" town squares and statues would crop up in even more Macedonian cities. Skopje's idea of "a shared historical heritage" would lose currency; the public would clamor for a stronger sense of exclusive "ownership" of what it considers its Macedonian cultural and historical legacy. (This would not lead to territorial claims on Greece, however.)

¶7. (C) A failure of NATO allies to persuade Greece to shift from its veto threat at the invitation stage to exercising the leverage of its parliamentary ratification after an invitation would reinforce Macedonia's historic perception of being besieged on nearly all sides (from Greece on the name, from Bulgaria on the Macedonian language, and from both Serbia and Greece on the status of the Macedonian Orthodox Church). Although Macedonian political leaders and the public have no inherent pro-Russian predisposition, in the short run their sense of exclusion and vulnerability would unhelpfully tempt Moscow to seek to increase its influence--particularly on the economic front.

¶8. (C) Internally, the failure of Macedonia to obtain a NATO invitation would unleash a round of destructive finger-pointing. The main ethnic Albanian party (opposition DUI) would bear the brunt of the government's criticism. Inter-ethnic tensions would increase, just as a newly-independent Kosovo was facing the challenge of managing its own inter-ethnic relations. Some ethnic Albanian radicals here, disillusioned by their dashed hopes for NATO membership, could revive the idea of splitting off parts of Macedonian territory to join with their Kosovo brethren. Or they could be pushed in that direction by ethnic Macedonians now less inclined to work on a multiethnic Macedonia. Implementation of the 2001 Framework Agreement would grind to a halt, increasing Albanian frustration and alienation in a state no longer perceived to hold promising future prospects for its citizens. Macedonia's support for Kosovo final status, including its support as a logistics lifeline for

NATO KFOR and other operations there, would diminish as public anger over NATO's perceived rejection grew and Macedonians felt threatened in their isolation rather than confident as invitees to join the NATO club.

¶9. (C/NF) PM Gruevski, seeking to exploit the political points he would score among his electorate by blaming Greece and the ethnic Albanians for Macedonia's having been sidelined by NATO, would call early elections. He would tap into the "circle the wagons" mood that a NATO rejection would create, further exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions. Foreign and domestic investors would flee the uncertainty and instability that would follow, further weakening an anemic economy.

¶10. (C) Society would not fracture completely, nor would Macedonia become a failed state. But a sense of isolation and vulnerability, coupled with a slowdown in movement on judicial reforms and rule of law, would provide a more inviting field of play for organized crime groups. Macedonia's incentives for cooperating with NATO and EU states on priority policy matters would be greatly diminished. Public support for Macedonia's participation in international security operations, from Iraq to Afghanistan, would be seriously impaired and parliamentary backing for those deployments would weaken.

NATO MEMBERSHIP: GETTING THERE FROM HERE

¶11. (C) To avoid the worst-case scenario depicted above, we believe we should pursue the following:

A.) Continue our firm support for the 1995 Interim Accord and encourage both sides to re-engage on the CBMs the Macedonians have proposed as a way for each side to demonstrate goodwill and to lower bilateral tensions, which currently are climbing (reftel).

B.) Get the Macedonians to propose -- before the Bucharest Summit and through the Nimetz process -- a formula that goes beyond the GOM's current "dual name" proposal by framing

SKOPJE 00000032 003 OF 003

conditions for constructing a differentiated "compound" name for use in international organizations, while ensuring the constitutional name remains intact and is used for bilateral relations where it has been recognized bilaterally. Making such a proposal before the summit would help the GOM begin the delicate task of preparing itself and then the Macedonian public for an eventual compromise on the use of Macedonia's name in international fora.

C.) Get the Macedonians to agree to pursue a definitive solution to the name dispute (not/not based solely on their dual name formulation) after they receive an invitation in order to achieve the final ratification of membership by all NATO allies (i.e., by Greece).

D.) Get Greece to agree to allow a performance-based invitation to Macedonia to proceed, with assurances from Macedonia and the United States that we would not seek or support a name change in NATO or UN absent agreement of Greece.

E.) Demarche NATO capitals to garner support for this approach, pressing the case for membership on performance and regional stability grounds.

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